MARJORIE LIU
SANA TAKEDA
image
27
MONSTRESS
2019 HUGO AWARD WINNER

THE STORY SO FAR...

The world is at war. Maika Halfwolf's biological father and his power-hungry Blood Court set off a bomb in the Cumaean holy city of Aurum, inflaming long-simmering tensions between humans and Arcanics. Now, Colonel Anuwat and her human army are marching on the walled Arcanic city of Ravenna, where Maika agreed to travel with her companions, Kippa and Corvin. Kippa hoped to offer aid to fox Arcanic refugees, while Corvin hoped to convince his healer sister, Bettani, to flee Ravenna. But it was Maika who took control of the panicked, leaderless city, using the power of Zinn, the Monstrum that lives inside her, to inspire fear and obedience in the hearts of Ravenna's residents and the hopeful refugees pounding on its walls. Now installed as Ravenna's unofficial but uncontested military leader, Maika offered a deal: the refugees could enter the city and keep their children safe, but only if every Arcanic over the age of twelve agreed to take up arms in the coming battle.

THE PLAYERS...

MAIKA An Arcanic teen who survived the Great War, and slavery at the hands of the Cumaean witch nuns. Ruthless and haunted, she is determined to uncover the truth behind her mother's murder — and her mother's secrets — in the hope that she can free herself from an ancient and dangerous god called a Monstrum that is imprisoned inside her body and fills her with an otherworldly hunger for human flesh.

ZINN A mysterious, primordial Monstrum of tremendous power that shares Maika's body and mind, and fights her for control. Once considered a god, and drawn into this world by the Shaman-Empress, this Monstrum is driven by a deadly hunger, consuming the lives of humans and Arcanics alike, leaving only their desiccated corpses behind. Though it may give the impression that its only wish is to survive, there's far more to this creature, and its desires, than meets the eye…

KIPPA An Arcanic fox girl saved from slavery by Maika. Innocent and optimistic, she is frightened by the Monstrum — but trusts Maika and will bravely defend her and others by rushing into battles too dangerous for a child.

SIR CORVIN D'ORO An Arcanic Lord, First Watchman of the Court and Commander of the Inner Wall. He is loyal to the Dusk Court but has willingly defied their orders because of his desire to protect Maika and his belief that she can and will serve a greater purpose.

TUYA Maika's closest friend in the world, who has been with her since before the Battle of Constantine. Unbeknownst to Maika, she is also the Baroness of the Last Dusk, a high-level member of the Arcanic Dusk Court tasked with containing — or even destroying — Maika's power.

WARLORD The Dawn Court's "Sword of the East," twin sister of Moriko Halfwolf, and Maika's aunt. Ruthless in her ambition, the Warlord's greatest desire is to unravel the mystery behind the destruction of Constantine. She believes the secrets of Constantine will protect the Arcanics in their impending war against the humans — but she does not realize that the answers she seeks lie within her young niece.

SHAMAN-EMPRESS The first and most powerful Arcanic who ever lived, a science-master of the highest order and Zinn's beloved. Maika is her direct descendant, and bears her Mark of the Eye.

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THE BATTLE OF CONSTANTINE. SIX YEARS AGO.
DO YOU HEAR THAT SCREAMING?
SOMETHING'S HAPPENING IN THE TRENCH.
IS THAT A WITCH DOWN THERE?
WAIT, DON'T GO ANY CLOSER --
COME ON, DEMON.
MARIUM NEEDS YOUR BONES.
THE WITCHES ARE HARVESTING!
TELL THE OTHERS!
DON'T TAKE MY SOUL!
THESE ORDERS ARE SHIT.
YOU CUMAEA HAVE TO WAIT -- OR GIVE US ACTUAL HELP.
OUR SUPPLY CHAIN IS RUBBISH, WE'RE RUNNING OUT OF AMMUNITION AND WEAPONS. WHO'S GOING TO SCAVENGE FOR US? I CAN'T AFFORD TO SEND SOLDIERS UP --
=URK=
THESE ORDERS COME FROM LADY SOPHIA FEKETE HERSELF.
SHE NEEDS THESE...DEMON BODIES...AS MUCH AS YOU NEED WEAPONS, COMMANDER.

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YOU HEAR THAT?! THEY'RE *HARVESTING!* WE CAN'T GO BACK TO THE TRENCH! I'D RATHER DIE UP HERE THAN BE HACKED APART!
BUT GO WHERE? THEY'LL JUST USE THE COLLARS TO EXPLODE US!
=GASP=
AT LEAST GETTING OUR HEADS BLOWN OFF BY THE COLLARS WOULD BE A FAST DEATH.
MAYBE WE'LL ESCAPE.
MAYBE WE'LL LIVE. *I WANT TO LIVE,* TUYA.
BETTER IF YOU DON'T.
LET'S RUN!
=GASP= MY FEET... WHY WON'T THEY MOVE?!
NO, NO, NO! I'M STUCK!
AIIEEEEE!!
EEEEKK!
NO... RUNNING... FOR... YOU...

MARIUM, GIVE ME STRENGTH.
MARIUM, GIVE ME THE WILL.
MARIUM, WE ARE GRATEFUL FOR YOUR ALCHEMY OF TRANSFORMING THESE DEMONS INTO YOUR BLESSINGS OF STRENGTH...
GODDESS!
LET ME GO!
...SO THAT WE MAY ELIMINATE THEIR FILTH FROM YOUR WORLD...
KILL ME! KILL ME! DON'T LET THEM TAKE ME --
TUYA, I'VE GOT YOU --
MAIKA!
CHOOM!

PRESENT.
"THIS IS THE THIRD OFFICER REPORTED MURDERED, COLONEL.
"THE WOUNDS INDICATE A CAT ATTACK.
"CATS ALSO POISONED THE GRAIN. OVER A HUNDRED HORSES ARE BEING PUT DOWN, AND WE'RE WAITING TO SEE IF ANY OTHERS SICKEN.
"AND...IT LOOKS AS THOUGH SOME WASTE BUCKETS FROM THE LATRINE WERE DUMPED INTO THE WATER TANKS."
THE CUMAEAN FAR-SEER REPORTED THAT A SMALL SQUAD IS RESPONSIBLE, SOMEWHERE CLOSE TO THE EAST.
AND? WHAT ELSE?

WELL... THAT WAS ALL SHE COULD TELL US, COLONEL.
THE FAR-SEER IS DEAD.
YOU COULD HAVE MENTIONED THAT FROM THE START.
WAS SHE MURDERED?
IT APPEARS SHE HAD...A STROKE?
YOU SOUND UNCERTAIN.
IT WAS HIDEOUS. HER EYES EXPLODED.
PARTS OF HER BRAIN CAME OUT, TOO. THEY'RE STILL...CLEANING UP BITS.
JUST BEFORE SHE DROPPED DEAD, SHE WAS BEGINNING TO REPORT ON A VISION OF SOME GIRL WHO IS HALF WOLF.
WE DON'T KNOW WHAT IT MEANS.
...HMMM... HALF WOLF... PERHAPS *THE* HALFWOLF, WHO GULL AND THE MOTHER SUPERIOR HAVE BEEN HUNTING?
GENERAL!
MARIUM, SAVE US!
WE HAVE ANOTHER... SITUATION.
WHAT... WHAT HAVE THE DEMONS DONE TO THEM?
=HURK=

URRGH
RNNFF
Colonel Armurat
AMATEURS.

=SIGH= AND A LETTER? SEEMS A BIT OVERDONE.
=GRNFFSH=
RRRIPP
Colonel Anuwat
STOP WHINING, SOLDIER.
=MMF=
Colonel Anuwat,
We await your arrival in Ravenna with giddy anticipation. We hope you enjoy this taste of what awaits you and your soldiers.
With no respect,
Your Future Demon Overlords
RELEASE THE NUNS.
BUT, GENERAL, THEY'RE UNTESTED... AND A LITTLE STRANGE...
THEN SEND THE INQUISITRIXES WITH THEM. AND PREPARE TO MARCH.
I WANT RAVENNA UNDER FEDERATION CONTROL BY TOMORROW EVENING. AND THEN WE'LL GIVE THESE ARCANICS SOMETHING TO FEAR.

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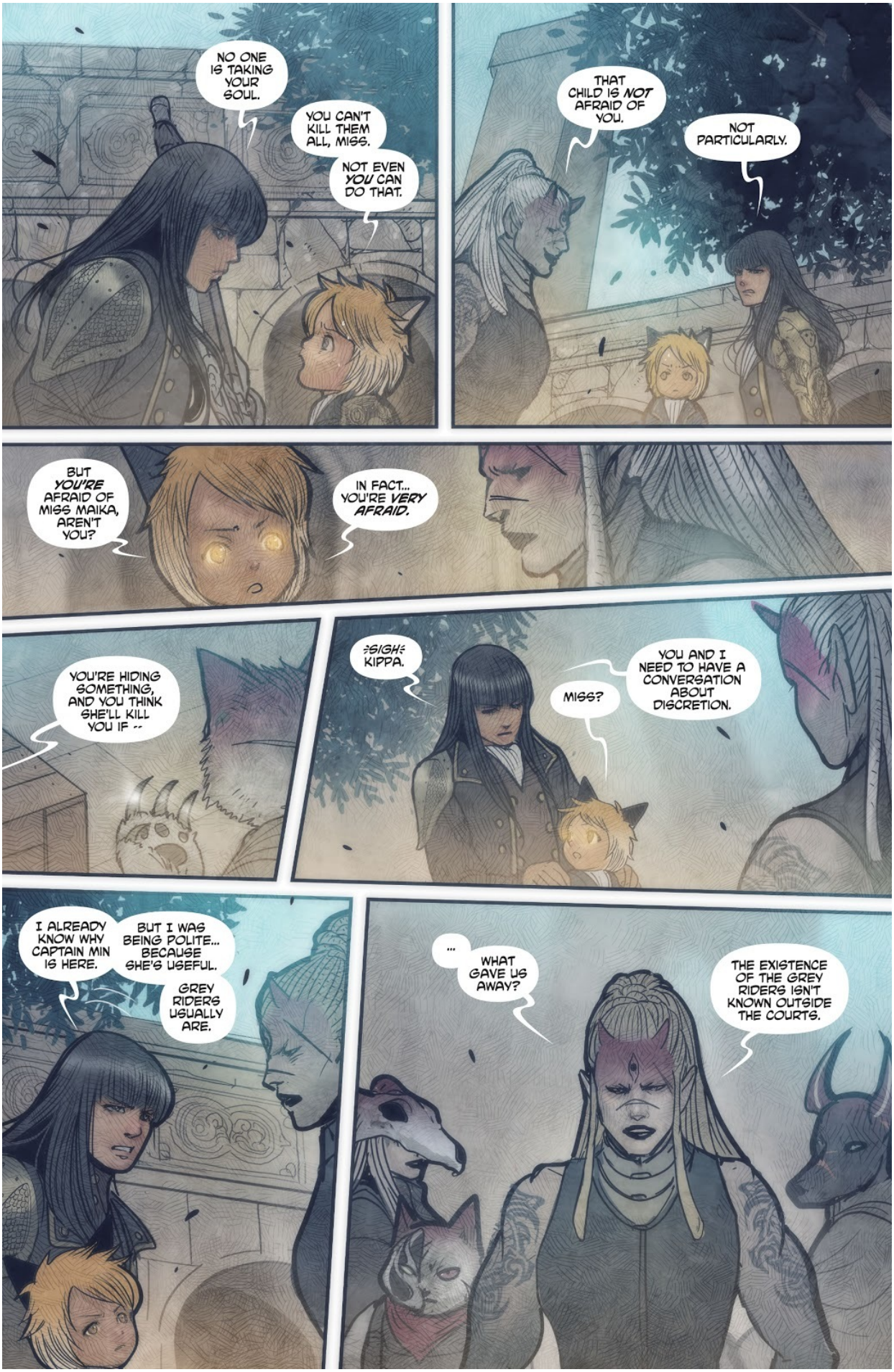
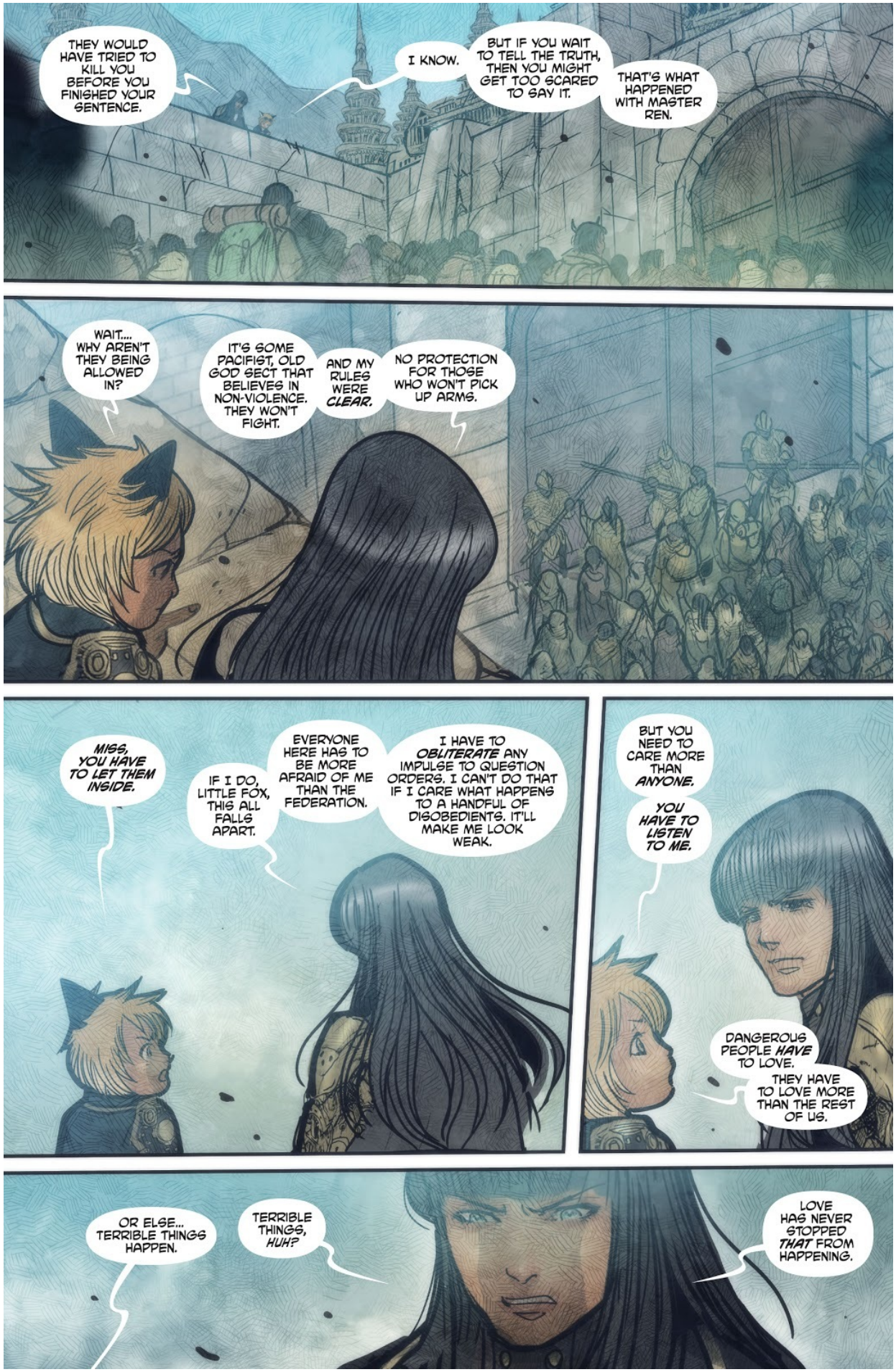
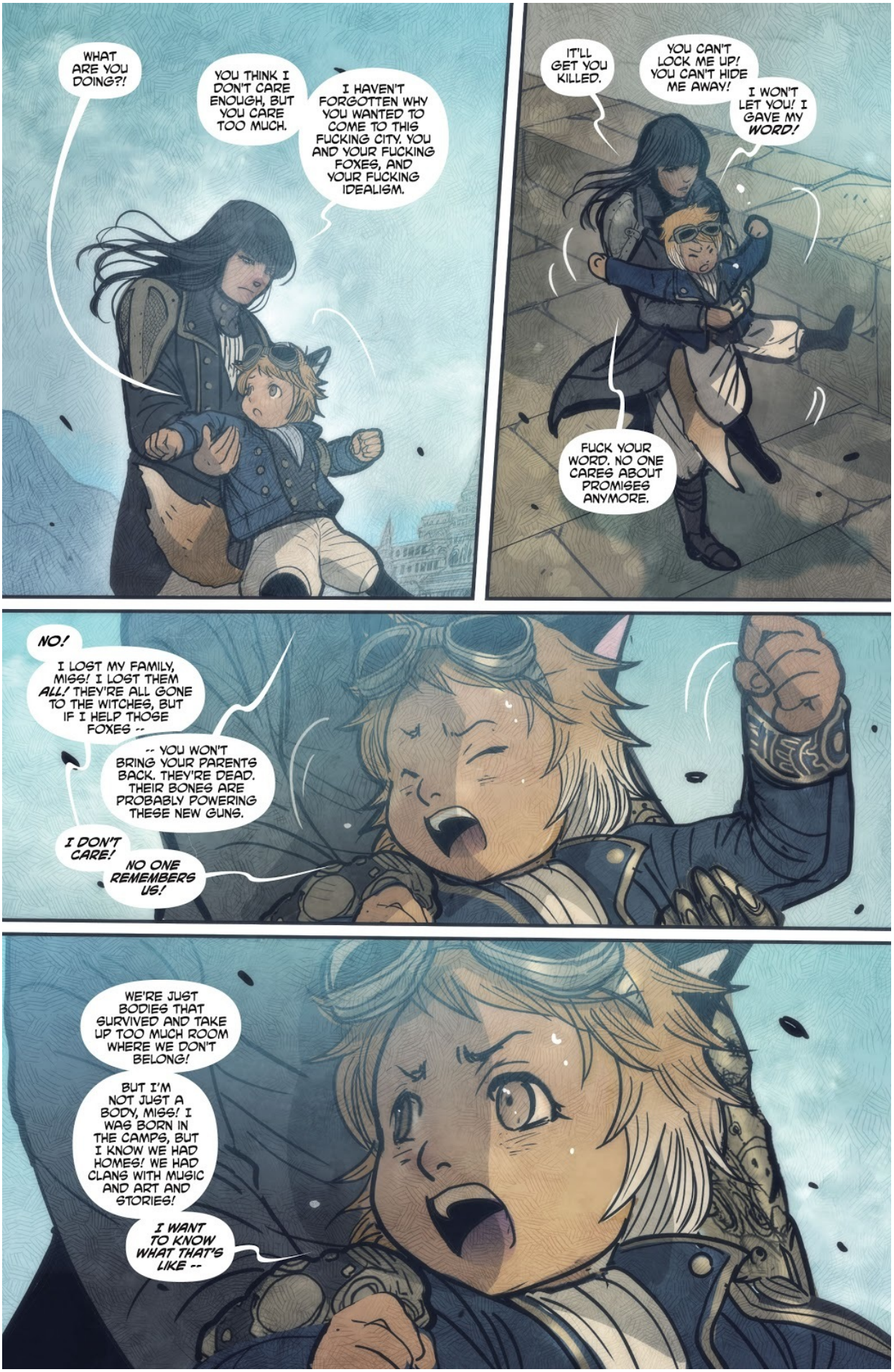
"YOUR STRATEGY IS HAVING SOME EFFECT, HALFWOLF. THE FEDERATION SOLDIERS ARE TERRIFIED.
"ALL THE ADVANCED FEDERATION UNITS ABANDONED THEIR POSTS IN THE FOREST.
"IT DIDN'T TAKE US LONG TO CATCH UP TO THEM.
"WE HUNG THE HUMANS FROM THEIR GUTS ALONG THE ROAD TO RAVENNA, AND SPIKED THEIR HEADS."
FORMER SOLDIERS AND THOSE WITH BATTLE-GIFTS, TO THE RIGHT!
EVERYONE ELSE, REPORT ON THE LEFT!
WHAT IS YOUR ARCANIC GIFT?
DON'T REALLY HAVE ONE, EXCEPT FOR KNOWING THE EARTH AND HOW TO GROW.
GOOD SENSE OF SMELL? NEVER BEEN BATTLE, NEITHER. WAS KEPT BACK TO WORK THE FIELDS.
YOU HAVE BATTLE EXPERIENCE?
WAS IN A BATALLION UNTIL MY LEG GOT BLOWN OFF. I CAN HANDLE MOST WEAPONS, ARCANIC AND FEDERATION, AS LONG AS I DON'T HAVE TO DO MUCH RUNNING.
GOT FAR SIGHT. ALWAYS WANTED TO BE A SNIPER BUT I WAS TOO OLD FOR THE LAST WAR.
TOUGH SKIN. KNIVES WON'T CUT ME EASY.
THE WEAPONS WE COLLECTED FROM THE HUMANS HAVE NEW WITCH UPGRADES. THE CHARGES SEEM TO BE FUELED BY LILIUM SHARDS.
ONLY THE CATS WERE ABLE TO TOUCH THEM WITHOUT FEELING ILL.
I DON'T GIVE A FUCK IF THE LILIUM MAKES EVERYONE BLEED OUT THE ASS, CAPTAIN MIN. WE CAN'T AFFORD NOT TO USE THESE GUNS.

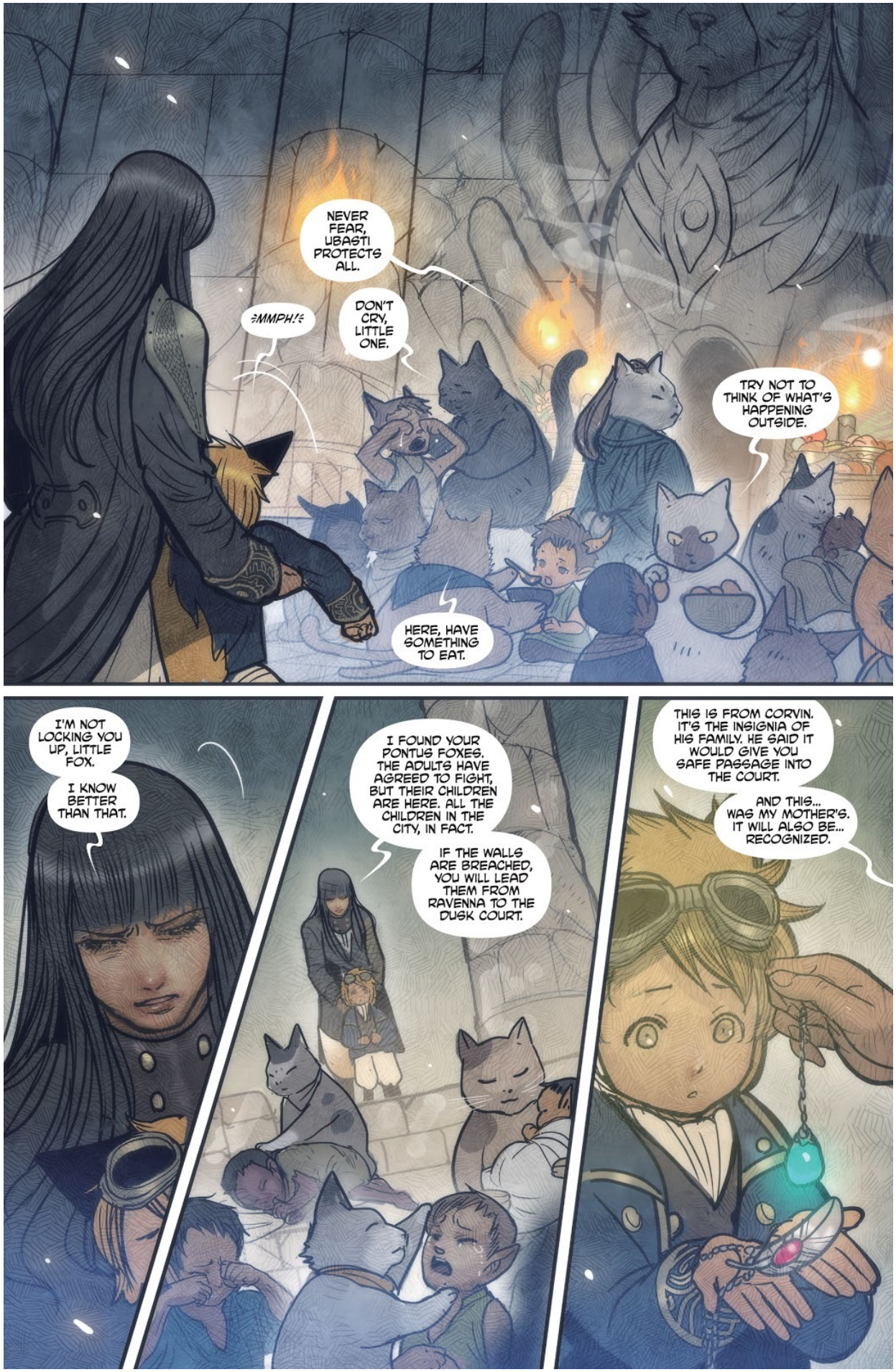
ALSO... WELL DONE.
HOW CONVENIENT THAT A TRAINED MILITARY UNIT JUST HAPPENED TO BE AT RAVENNA...PASSING THROUGH.
WE'RE OLD FRIENDS. FOOT SOLDIERS DURING THE WAR, TRYING TO FIND A PLACE TO RESETTLE. STRENGTH IN NUMBERS, YOU KNOW, BUT HARDLY A... UNIT.
IF YOU SAY SO. NO ONE ELSE SEEMED TO HAVE THE STOMACH FOR MY... DEMANDS.
YOU'RE A SAVAGE, HALFWOLF. BUT A SAVAGE IS A DAMN USEFUL THING IN A WAR.
TO QUOTE THE POETS...
...YOU DON'T HAVE TO KILL MANY PEOPLE TO TURN A WAR...YOU JUST HAVE TO KILL THEM *HORRIBLY.*
FEAR DOES THE REST.
FEAR WON'T BE ENOUGH.
THE FEDERATION WON'T BACK DOWN, NOT AFTER THE BOMBING AT AURUM.
THE OFFICERS WILL DRIVE THE SOLDIERS WITH WHIPS, IF THEY HAVE TO.
NNN...
THIS ISN'T FOR YOU, LITTLE FOX. IT'S ALREADY MAKING YOU SICK.
BUT I'LL NEED TO FIGHT.
THE WITCHES ARE COMING, AND I CAN'T LET THEM TAKE MY SOUL.


NO ONE IS TAKING YOUR SOUL.
YOU CAN'T KILL THEM ALL, MISS.
NOT EVEN *YOU* CAN DO THAT.
THAT CHILD IS *NOT* AFRAID OF YOU.
NOT PARTICULARLY.
BUT *YOU'RE* AFRAID OF MISS MAIKA, AREN'T YOU?
IN FACT... YOU'RE *VERY AFRAID.*
YOU'RE HIDING SOMETHING, AND YOU THINK SHE'LL KILL YOU IF --
=SIGH= KIPPA.
MISS?
YOU AND I NEED TO HAVE A CONVERSATION ABOUT DISCRETION.
I ALREADY KNOW WHY CAPTAIN MIN IS HERE.
BUT I WAS BEING POLITE... BECAUSE SHE'S USEFUL.
GREY RIDERS USUALLY ARE.
...
WHAT GAVE US AWAY?
THE EXISTENCE OF THE GREY RIDERS ISN'T KNOWN OUTSIDE THE COURTS.

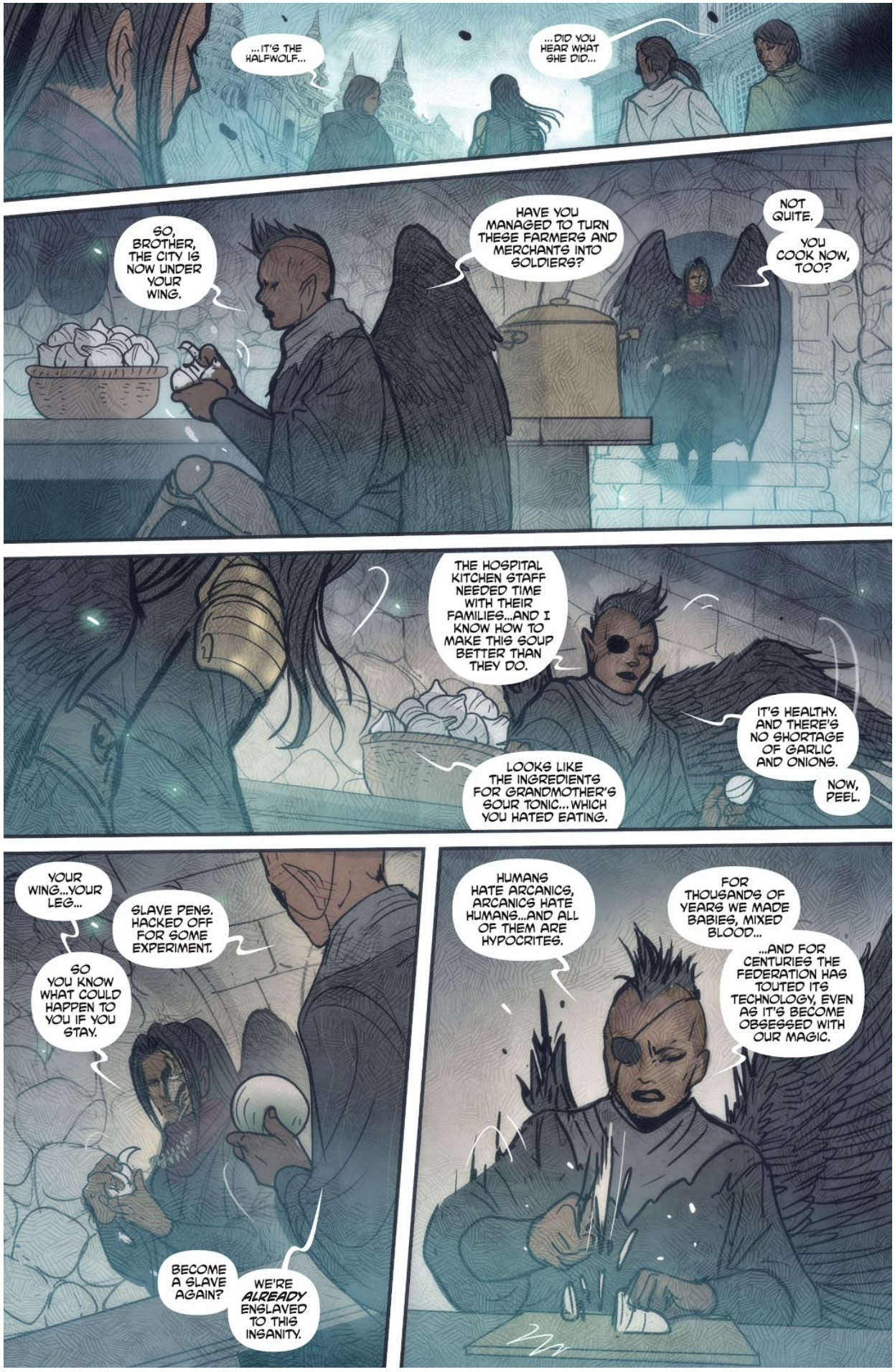
YOU SPEAK WITH THE SAME ACCENT AS ULIAZA, YOUR FORMER COMMANDER. YOU GIVE ORDERS THE SAME, YOU STAND THE SAME.
SHE TRAINED YOU TOO WELL.
ALSO, YOU SHOULD HIDE YOUR TATTOOS.
I SEE.
AND?
AND, NOTHING. AS LONG AS YOU FIGHT FOR RAVENNA.
BUT IF YOU DECIDE TO BE STUPID...
SHE CAN'T POSSIBLY KNOW THE WARLORD SENT US.
WHAT MATTERS IS THAT SHE KNOWS ULIAZA. IT MEANS THE HALFWOLF IS AFFILIATED WITH THE BLOOD COURT.
SO WHAT? WE SHOULD HAVE ALREADY SECURED HER AND GONE. WE'VE HAD SO MANY OPPORTUNITIES --
WE VOTED ON THIS, VELA. RAVENNA MUST NOT BE LOST TO THE FEDERATION. ISN'T THAT MORE IMPORTANT?
NOT IF WE'RE GOING TO ABANDON OUR OATHS -- JUST LIKE COMMANDER ULIAZA ABANDONED US.
FOR THE LOVE OF UBASTI, JUST GIVE IT UP. WE SHOULD HAVE LEFT WITH ULIAZA, INSTEAD OF LETTING THE WARLORD WASTE OUR GIFTS ON KIDNAPPINGS.
QUIET, BOTH OF YOU.
AT THE MOMENT, I THINK WE HAVE A BETTER CHANCE OF SURVIVING A FEDERATION SIEGE THAN CAPTURING THE HALFWOLF.
BUT, TO QUOTE THE POETS...
...WAR IS THE MUSE OF OPPORTUNITY.
"SHE'S SUPPOSED TO HURT YOU, MISS. I COULD SEE IT INSIDE HER. I HAD TO SAY SOMETHING."

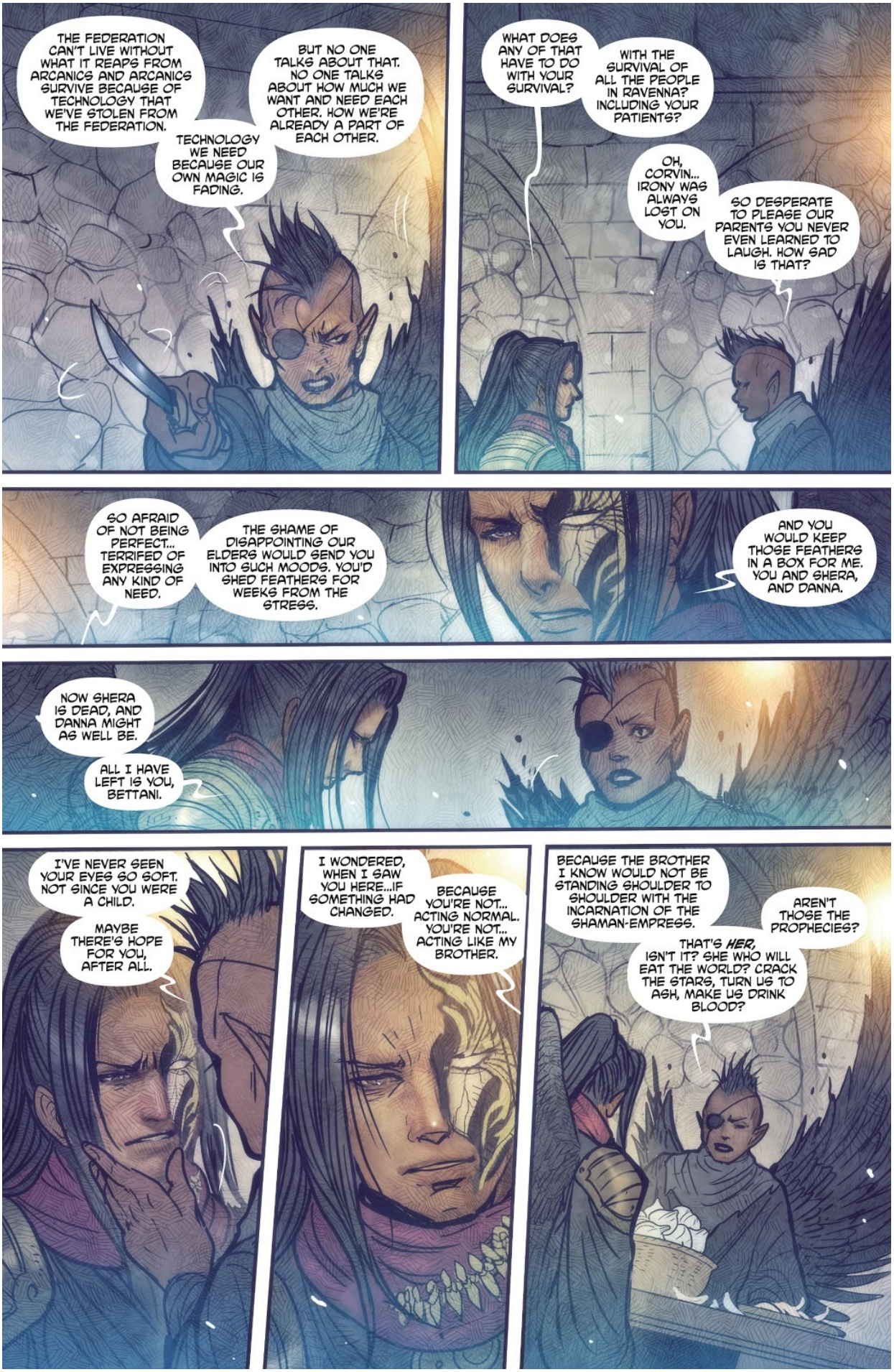

THEY WOULD HAVE TRIED TO KILL YOU BEFORE YOU FINISHED YOUR SENTENCE.
I KNOW.
BUT IF YOU WAIT TO TELL THE TRUTH, THEN YOU MIGHT GET TOO SCARED TO SAY IT.
THAT'S WHAT HAPPENED WITH MASTER REN.
WAIT.... WHY AREN'T THEY BEING ALLOWED IN?
IT'S SOME PACIFIST, OLD GOD SECT THAT BELIEVES IN NON-VIOLENCE. THEY WON'T FIGHT.
AND MY RULES WERE *CLEAR.*
NO PROTECTION FOR THOSE WHO WON'T PICK UP ARMS.
MISS, YOU HAVE TO LET THEM INSIDE.
IF I DO, LITTLE FOX, THIS ALL FALLS APART.
EVERYONE HERE HAS TO BE MORE AFRAID OF ME THAN THE FEDERATION.
I HAVE TO *OBLITERATE* ANY IMPULSE TO QUESTION ORDERS. I CAN'T DO THAT IF I CARE WHAT HAPPENS TO A HANDFUL OF DISOBEDIENTS. IT'LL MAKE ME LOOK WEAK.
BUT YOU NEED TO CARE MORE THAN *ANYONE.*
YOU HAVE TO LISTEN TO ME.
DANGEROUS PEOPLE *HAVE* TO LOVE.
THEY HAVE TO LOVE MORE THAN THE REST OF US.
OR ELSE... TERRIBLE THINGS HAPPEN.
TERRIBLE THINGS, *HUH?*
LOVE HAS NEVER STOPPED *THAT* FROM HAPPENING.

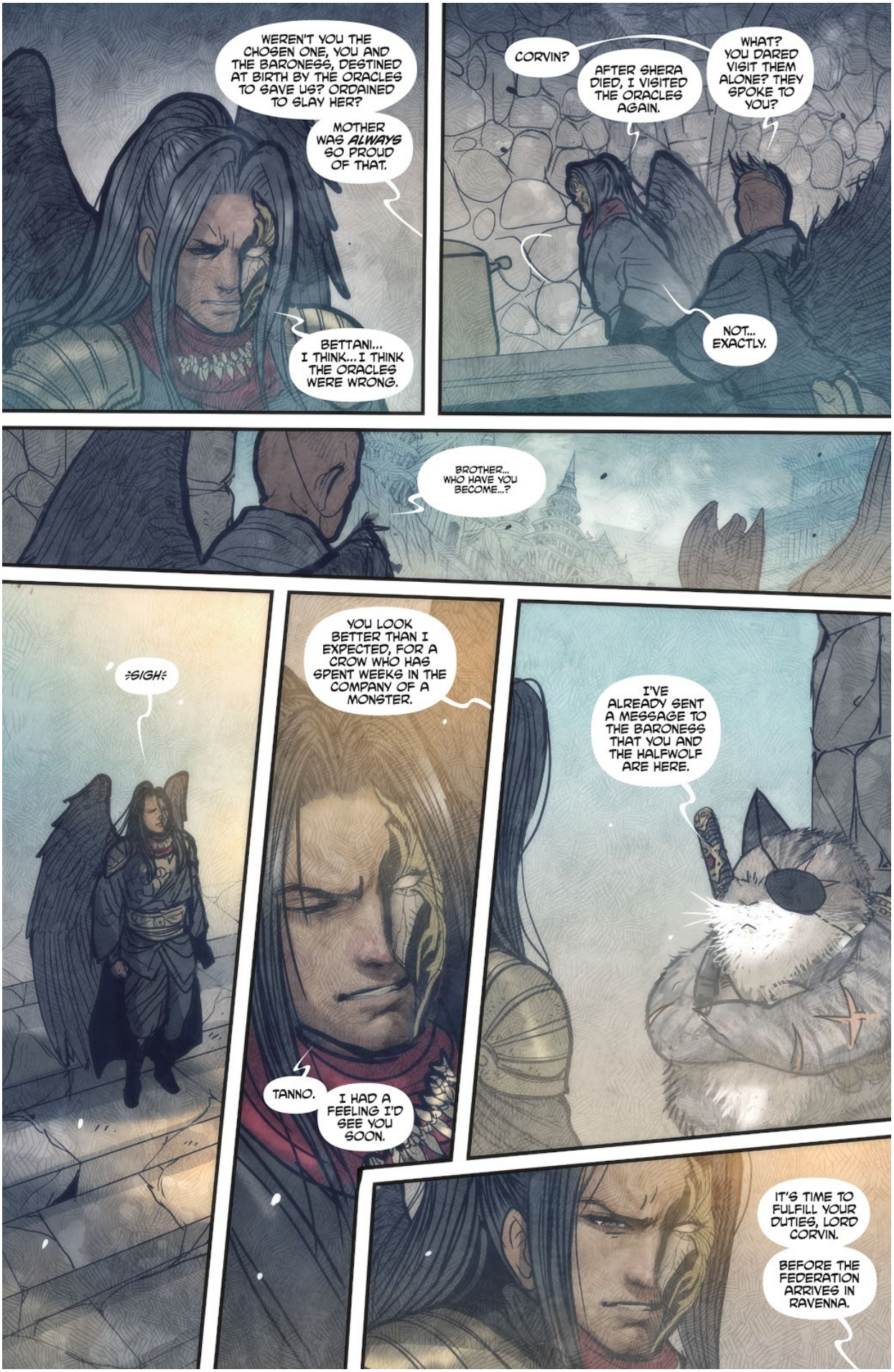

WHAT ARE YOU DOING?!
YOU THINK I DON'T CARE ENOUGH, BUT YOU CARE TOO MUCH.
I HAVEN'T FORGOTTEN WHY YOU WANTED TO COME TO THIS FUCKING CITY. YOU AND YOUR FUCKING FOXES, AND YOUR FUCKING IDEALISM.
IT'LL GET YOU KILLED.
YOU CAN'T LOCK ME UP! YOU CAN'T HIDE ME AWAY!
I WON'T LET YOU! I GAVE MY WORD!
FUCK YOUR WORD. NO ONE CARES ABOUT PROMISES ANYMORE.
NO!
I LOST MY FAMILY, MISS! I LOST THEM ALL! THEY'RE ALL GONE TO THE WITCHES, BUT IF I HELP THOSE FOXES --
-- YOU WON'T BRING YOUR PARENTS BACK. THEY'RE DEAD. THEIR BONES ARE PROBABLY POWERING THESE NEW GUNS.
I DON'T CARE!
NO ONE REMEMBERS US!
WE'RE JUST BODIES THAT SURVIVED AND TAKE UP TOO MUCH ROOM WHERE WE DON'T BELONG!
BUT I'M NOT JUST A BODY, MISS! I WAS BORN IN THE CAMPS, BUT I KNOW WE HAD HOMES! WE HAD CLANS WITH MUSIC AND ART AND STORIES!
I WANT TO KNOW WHAT THAT'S LIKE --

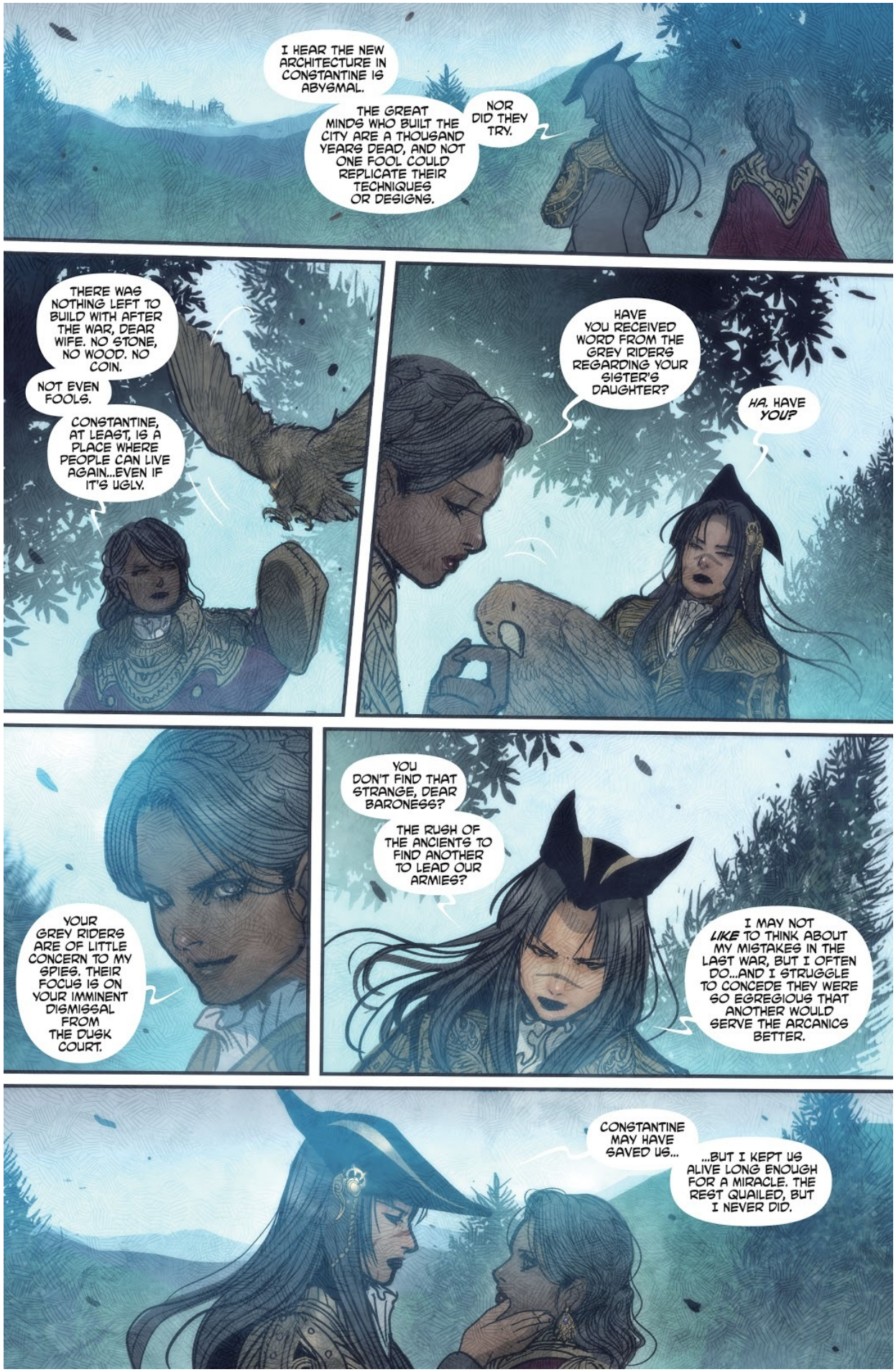

NEVER FEAR, UBASTI PROTECTS ALL.
DON'T CRY, LITTLE ONE.
=MMPH!=
TRY NOT TO THINK OF WHAT'S HAPPENING OUTSIDE.
HERE, HAVE SOMETHING TO EAT.
I'M NOT LOCKING YOU UP, LITTLE FOX.
I KNOW BETTER THAN THAT.
I FOUND YOUR PONTUS FOXES. THE ADULTS HAVE AGREED TO FIGHT, BUT THEIR CHILDREN ARE HERE. ALL THE CHILDREN IN THE CITY, IN FACT.
IF THE WALLS ARE BREACHED, YOU WILL LEAD THEM FROM RAVENNA TO THE DUSK COURT.
THIS IS FROM CORVIN. IT'S THE INSIGNIA OF HIS FAMILY. HE SAID IT WOULD GIVE YOU SAFE PASSAGE INTO THE COURT.
AND THIS... WAS MY MOTHER'S. IT WILL ALSO BE... RECOGNIZED.

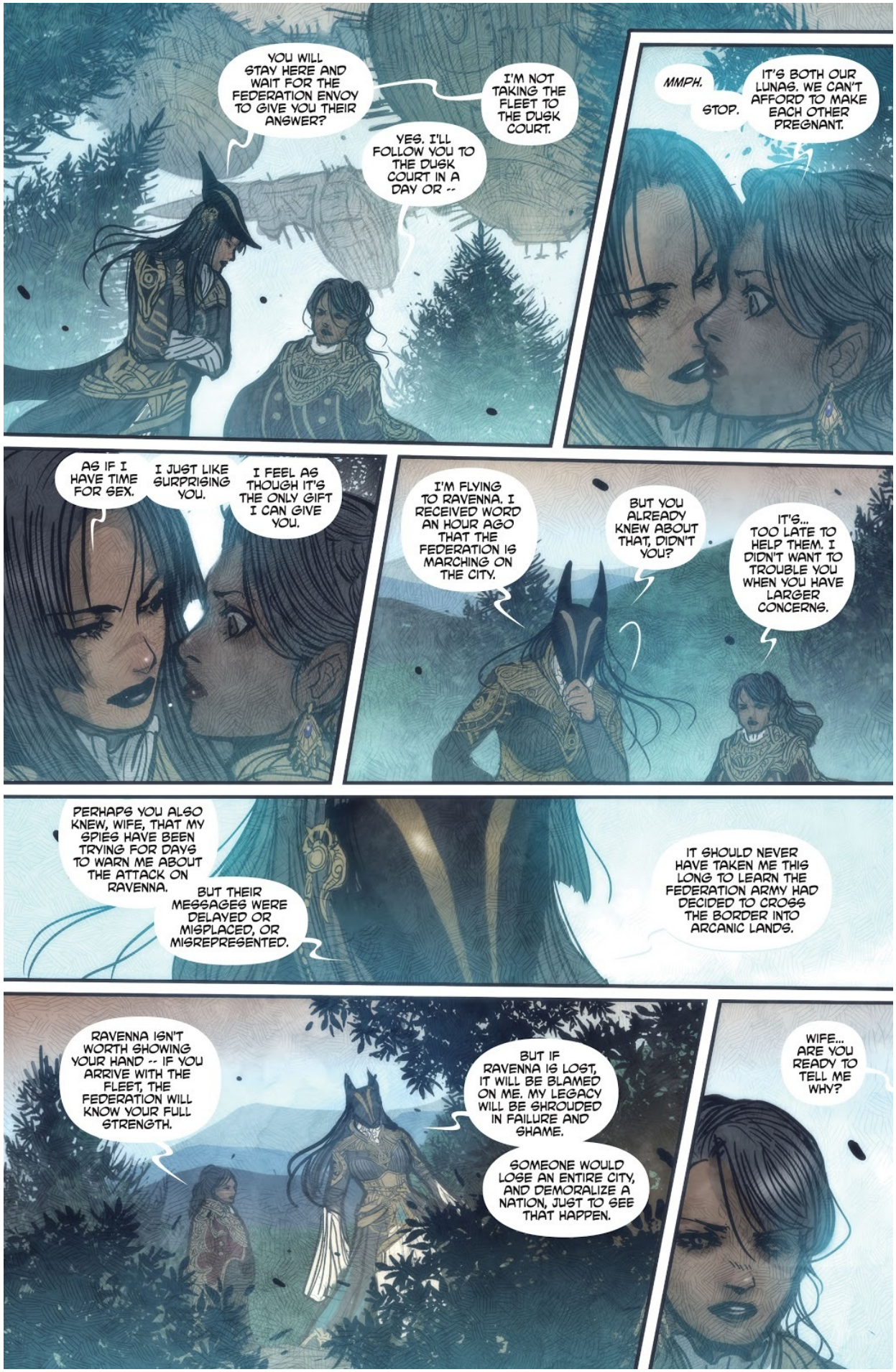
MISS...
LISTEN FOR THE BELLS.
IF YOU HEAR THEM, DON'T WAIT, JUST GO.
YOU NEVER WANTED TO COME TO RAVENNA. YOU WERE SUPPOSED TO GO FIND THE MASK.
BUT YOU STAYED. YOU'RE FIGHTING. IT'S BECAUSE YOU CARE.
DON'T FORGET THAT, MISS. YOU CARE.
LITTLE FOX... YOU'RE SO...
WHAT, MISS?
NOTHING.


...IT'S THE HALFWOLF...
...DID YOU HEAR WHAT SHE DID...
SO, BROTHER, THE CITY IS NOW UNDER YOUR WING.
HAVE YOU MANAGED TO TURN THESE FARMERS AND MERCHANTS INTO SOLDIERS?
NOT QUITE.
YOU COOK NOW, TOO?
THE HOSPITAL KITCHEN STAFF NEEDED TIME WITH THEIR FAMILIES...AND I KNOW HOW TO MAKE THIS SOUP BETTER THAN THEY DO.
IT'S HEALTHY. AND THERE'S NO SHORTAGE OF GARLIC AND ONIONS.
NOW, PEEL.
LOOKS LIKE THE INGREDIENTS FOR GRANDMOTHER'S SOUR TONIC... WHICH YOU HATED EATING.
YOUR WING...YOUR LEG...
SLAVE PENS. HACKED OFF FOR SOME EXPERIMENT.
SO YOU KNOW WHAT COULD HAPPEN TO YOU IF YOU STAY.
BECOME A SLAVE AGAIN?
WE'RE *ALREADY* ENSLAVED TO THIS INSANITY.
HUMANS HATE ARCANICS, ARCANICS HATE HUMANS...AND ALL OF THEM ARE HYPOCRITES.
FOR THOUSANDS OF YEARS WE MADE BABIES, MIXED BLOOD...
...AND FOR CENTURIES THE FEDERATION HAS TOUTED ITS TECHNOLOGY, EVEN AS IT'S BECOME OBSESSED WITH OUR MAGIC.


THE FEDERATION CAN'T LIVE WITHOUT WHAT IT REAPS FROM ARCANICS AND ARCANICS SURVIVE BECAUSE OF TECHNOLOGY THAT WE'VE STOLEN FROM THE FEDERATION.
TECHNOLOGY WE NEED BECAUSE OUR OWN MAGIC IS FADING.
BUT NO ONE TALKS ABOUT THAT. NO ONE TALKS ABOUT HOW MUCH WE WANT AND NEED EACH OTHER. HOW WE'RE ALREADY A PART OF EACH OTHER.
WHAT DOES ANY OF THAT HAVE TO DO WITH YOUR SURVIVAL?
WITH THE SURVIVAL OF ALL THE PEOPLE IN RAVENNA? INCLUDING YOUR PATIENTS?
OH, CORVIN... IRONY WAS ALWAYS LOST ON YOU.
SO DESPERATE TO PLEASE OUR PARENTS YOU NEVER EVEN LEARNED TO LAUGH. HOW SAD IS THAT?
SO AFRAID OF NOT BEING PERFECT... TERRIFED OF EXPRESSING ANY KIND OF NEED.
THE SHAME OF DISAPPOINTING OUR ELDERS WOULD SEND YOU INTO SUCH MOODS. YOU'D SHED FEATHERS FOR WEEKS FROM THE STRESS.
AND YOU WOULD KEEP THOSE FEATHERS IN A BOX FOR ME. YOU AND SHERA, AND DANNA.
NOW SHERA IS DEAD, AND DANNA MIGHT AS WELL BE.
ALL I HAVE LEFT IS YOU, BETTANI.
I'VE NEVER SEEN YOUR EYES SO SOFT. NOT SINCE YOU WERE A CHILD.
MAYBE THERE'S HOPE FOR YOU, AFTER ALL.
I WONDERED, WHEN I SAW YOU HERE...IF SOMETHING HAD CHANGED.
BECAUSE YOU'RE NOT... ACTING NORMAL. YOU'RE NOT... ACTING LIKE MY BROTHER.
BECAUSE THE BROTHER I KNOW WOULD NOT BE STANDING SHOULDER TO SHOULDER WITH THE INCARNATION OF THE SHAMAN-EMPRESS.
AREN'T THOSE THE PROPHECIES?
THAT'S *HER*, ISN'T IT? SHE WHO WILL EAT THE WORLD? CRACK THE STARS, TURN US TO ASH, MAKE US DRINK BLOOD?


WEREN'T YOU THE CHOSEN ONE, YOU AND THE BARONESS, DESTINED AT BIRTH BY THE ORACLES TO SAVE US? ORDAINED TO SLAY HER?
MOTHER WAS *ALWAYS* SO PROUD OF THAT.
BETTANI... I THINK... I THINK THE ORACLES WERE WRONG.
CORVIN?
AFTER SHERA DIED, I VISITED THE ORACLES AGAIN.
WHAT? YOU DARED VISIT THEM ALONE? THEY SPOKE TO YOU?
NOT... EXACTLY.
BROTHER... WHO HAVE YOU BECOME...?
SIGH
YOU LOOK BETTER THAN I EXPECTED, FOR A CROW WHO HAS SPENT WEEKS IN THE COMPANY OF A MONSTER.
I'VE ALREADY SENT A MESSAGE TO THE BARONESS THAT YOU AND THE HALFWOLF ARE HERE.
TANNO.
I HAD A FEELING I'D SEE YOU SOON.
IT'S TIME TO FULFILL YOUR DUTIES, LORD CORVIN.
BEFORE THE FEDERATION ARRIVES IN RAVENNA.


I HEAR THE NEW ARCHITECTURE IN CONSTANTINE IS ABYSMAL.
THE GREAT MINDS WHO BUILT THE CITY ARE A THOUSAND YEARS DEAD, AND NOT ONE FOOL COULD REPLICATE THEIR TECHNIQUES OR DESIGNS.
NOR DID THEY TRY.
THERE WAS NOTHING LEFT TO BUILD WITH AFTER THE WAR, DEAR WIFE. NO STONE, NO WOOD. NO COIN.
NOT EVEN FOOLS.
CONSTANTINE, AT LEAST, IS A PLACE WHERE PEOPLE CAN LIVE AGAIN...EVEN IF IT'S UGLY.
HAVE YOU RECEIVED WORD FROM THE GREY RIDERS REGARDING YOUR SISTER'S DAUGHTER?
HA. HAVE *YOU?*
YOUR GREY RIDERS ARE OF LITTLE CONCERN TO MY SPIES. THEIR FOCUS IS ON YOUR IMMINENT DISMISSAL FROM THE DUSK COURT.
YOU DON'T FIND THAT STRANGE, DEAR BARONESS?
THE RUSH OF THE ANCIENTS TO FIND ANOTHER TO LEAD OUR ARMIES?
I MAY NOT *LIKE* TO THINK ABOUT MY MISTAKES IN THE LAST WAR, BUT I OFTEN DO...AND I STRUGGLE TO CONCEDE THEY WERE SO EGREGIOUS THAT ANOTHER WOULD SERVE THE ARCANICS BETTER.
CONSTANTINE MAY HAVE SAVED US...
...BUT I KEPT US ALIVE LONG ENOUGH FOR A MIRACLE. THE REST QUAILED, BUT I NEVER DID.


YOU WILL STAY HERE AND WAIT FOR THE FEDERATION ENVOY TO GIVE YOU THEIR ANSWER?
I'M NOT TAKING THE FLEET TO THE DUSK COURT.
YES. I'LL FOLLOW YOU TO THE DUSK COURT IN A DAY OR --
MMPH.
STOP.
IT'S BOTH OUR LUNAS. WE CAN'T AFFORD TO MAKE EACH OTHER PREGNANT.
AS IF I HAVE TIME FOR SEX.
I JUST LIKE SURPRISING YOU.
I FEEL AS THOUGH IT'S THE ONLY GIFT I CAN GIVE YOU.
I'M FLYING TO RAVENNA. I RECEIVED WORD AN HOUR AGO THAT THE FEDERATION IS MARCHING ON THE CITY.
BUT YOU ALREADY KNEW ABOUT THAT, DIDN'T YOU?
IT'S... TOO LATE TO HELP THEM. I DIDN'T WANT TO TROUBLE YOU WHEN YOU HAVE LARGER CONCERNS.
PERHAPS YOU ALSO KNEW, WIFE, THAT MY SPIES HAVE BEEN TRYING FOR DAYS TO WARN ME ABOUT THE ATTACK ON RAVENNA.
BUT THEIR MESSAGES WERE DELAYED OR MISPLACED, OR MISREPRESENTED.
IT SHOULD NEVER HAVE TAKEN ME THIS LONG TO LEARN THE FEDERATION ARMY HAD DECIDED TO CROSS THE BORDER INTO ARCANIC LANDS.
RAVENNA ISN'T WORTH SHOWING YOUR HAND -- IF YOU ARRIVE WITH THE FLEET, THE FEDERATION WILL KNOW YOUR FULL STRENGTH.
BUT IF RAVENNA IS LOST, IT WILL BE BLAMED ON ME. MY LEGACY WILL BE SHROUDED IN FAILURE AND SHAME.
SOMEONE WOULD LOSE AN ENTIRE CITY, AND DEMORALIZE A NATION, JUST TO SEE THAT HAPPEN.
WIFE... ARE YOU READY TO TELL ME WHY?

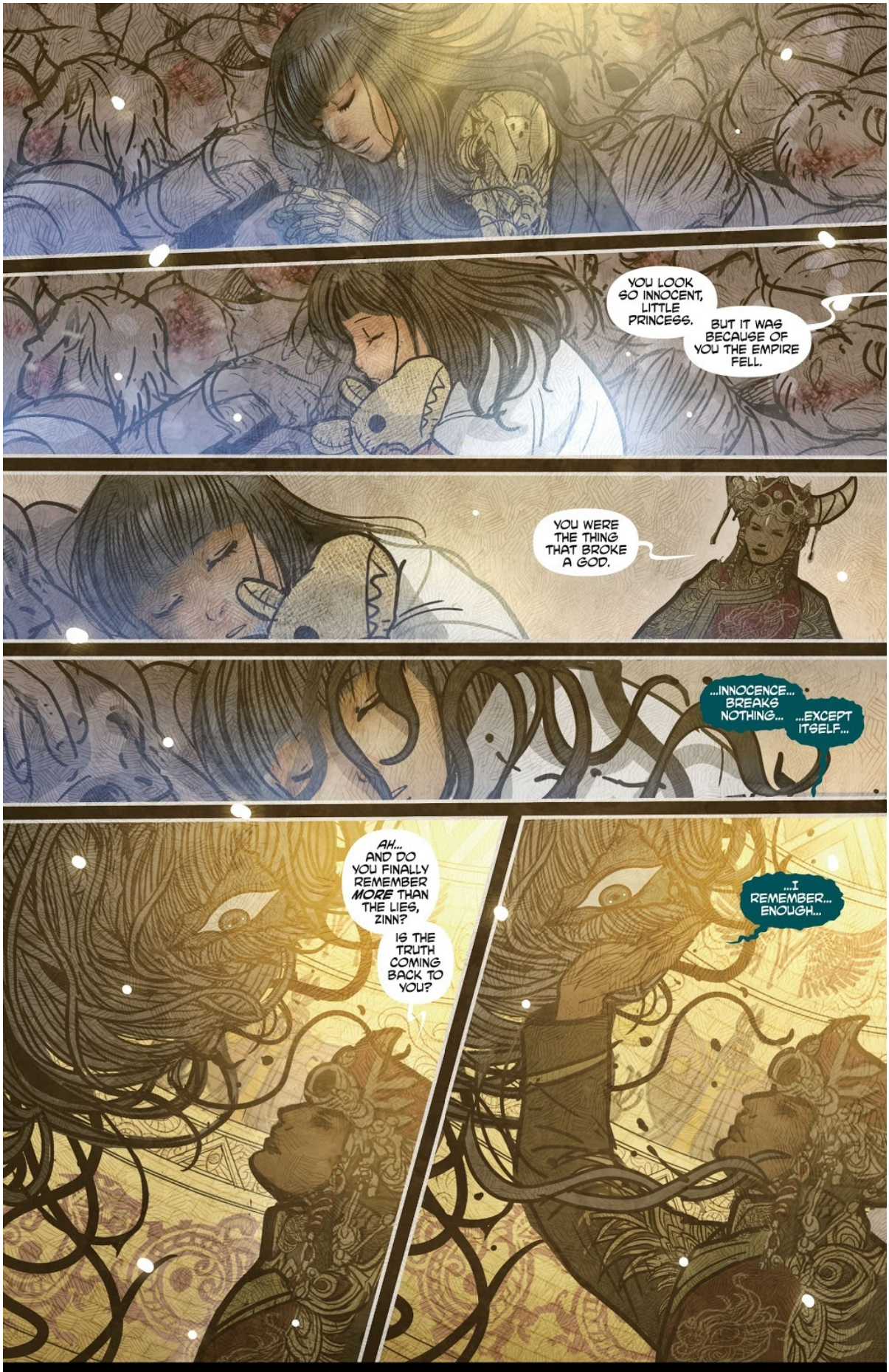
BUT...WHY WOULD YOU DESTROY THE TUNNEL LEADING FROM THE TEMPLE OUT OF THE CITY? HOW WILL WE ESCAPE?
IT WAS BY THE ORDER OF THE HALFWOLF. WE CAN'T AFFORD THE POSSIBILITY OF ANY HUMANS SNEAKING INTO RAVENNA.
BUT DO NOT WORRY, CHILD. SHE KNOWS A CAT ALWAYS HAS A WAY.
ONLY UBASTI'S PRIESTS KNOW ABOUT THIS PASSAGE. IT LEADS TO A HIDDEN SECTION OF RAVENNA'S WALL, NEAR THE RAVINE.
THANK YOU FOR PRAYING TO UBASTI WITH ME, KIPPA.
BUT NOW YOU SHOULD BEGIN PREPARING FOR THE WORST.
...YES... OF COURSE...
MISS TOLD ME I WAS IN CHARGE OF PROTECTING THE CHILDREN.
SHE DIDN'T SPECIFY *WHERE* THOSE CHILDREN ARE. I WOULDN'T BE BREAKING MY WORD.
HUFF HUFF
PSST! HEY!
I'VE COME TO HELP!

WE OWE YOU OUR LIVES, LITTLE ONE.
AND WE'LL HEED YOUR WARNING. WE WON'T LEAVE THE TUNNEL, NOT UNLESS YOU GIVE THE WORD.
DAMNED FOXES.
YOU CAN NEVER TRUST THEM.
I KNOW YOU...
YOUR NAME IS TANNO! YOU TRIED TO CAPTURE MISS!
OF COURSE I DID. MAIKA HALFWOLF IS A DANGEROUS WEAPON.
BUT AT THIS PRECISE MOMENT, YOU MIGHT BE A BIGGER PROBLEM.
YOU RISK ALL OF RAVENNA.
WORSE, YOU BROKE TRUST WITH A PRIEST OF UBASTI, OPENING THAT PASSAGE TO STRANGERS.
HOW COULD YOU BE SO CARELESS?
CORVIN IS A DAMNED FOOL...AND SO IS REN.
WHY DO YOU MATTER TO ANY OF THEM? ESPECIALLY THE HALFWOLF? IT DOESN'T MAKE SENSE.
YOU'RE THE ONE THING THE BARONESS DOESN'T UNDERSTAND.
EVEN THE SEERS DO NOT --
GODDESS!
GUH

WHAT A STROKE OF HOLY LUCK.
MARIUM SMILES UPON US.
MARIUM BLESSES WITH HER GUIDANCE.
MARIUM HAS BEEN WORKING THROUGH YOU TONIGHT, YOUNG DEMON.
YOU SHOWED US A LOVELY WAY INTO THE CITY.

SOMETHING IS WRONG.
MOST CERTAINLY.
THOSE RECRUITS WEREN'T SUPPOSED TO FIGHT. THEIR ORDERS WERE TO BLOW UP THE ROAD, THEN RUN. THAT WAS THE ONLY REASON WE LEFT THEM DOWN THERE, BECAUSE THEY'RE FAST.
THEY'RE GOING TO GET PINNED DOWN.
TO QUOTE THE POETS...IN WAR THE EAGER DIE SECOND -- AFTER THE INNOCENT.
YOU SEEM A LITTLE *DRAINED.* ARE YOU ILL, HALFWOLF?
THE RECRUITS. HOW DO WE RESCUE THEM?
WE DON'T. I'D BE MURDERING GREY RIDERS TO SAVE THOSE EAGER FOOLS.
RETURN TO RAVENNA, MIN. I'LL MEET YOU THERE.
WHAT? YOU CAN'T POSSIBLY...
I NEED YOU ALIVE. THOSE ARE MY ORDERS.
TO QUOTE THE POETS... IN WAR, NOTHING DISAPPOINTS QUITE LIKE OBEDIENCE.

AAIEE!
KILL 'EM!
KILL 'EM ALL!
I'M NOT LEAVING YOU!
CHOOM!
...GO...
YOUR HORNS ARE GONNA LOOK GOOD ON MY WALL.
YOUR FACE WILL LOOK GOOD IN MY TEETH.
RUN.
ƷZZZTƸ...SCREAMS FROM THE FOREST... REINFORCEMENTS HAVEN'T RETURNED...ƷZZZTƸ... WHAT ARE YOUR ORDERS... ƷZZZTƸ...
TELL THEM NOT TO WASTE MORE LIVES ON WHATEVER'S IN THERE. IF IT'S NOT ADVANCING ON US, THEN IT'S A DISTRACTION.
REGROUP, AND MARCH AROUND.


YOU LOOK SO INNOCENT, LITTLE PRINCESS.
BUT IT WAS BECAUSE OF YOU THE EMPIRE FELL.
YOU WERE THE THING THAT BROKE A GOD.
...INNOCENCE... BREAKS NOTHING...
...EXCEPT ITSELF...
AH... AND DO YOU FINALLY REMEMBER *MORE* THAN THE LIES, ZINN?
IS THE TRUTH COMING BACK TO YOU?
...I REMEMBER... ENOUGH...

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...I REMEMBER...
...MY BELOVED...
...I REMEMBER...
...WHAT OUR LOVE...
...CREATED...

OH, ZINN...
LOOK AGAIN.
YOU DON'T REMEMBER ANYTHING YET AT ALL.
UM, HELLO? MISTER MONSTER?
I DON'T MEAN TO INTERRUPT, BUT...
...HELP?
WHAT THE FUCK IS THIS?
...HELP...

=GASP=
KIPPA.
WHAT... WHAT HAPPENED?
THAT'S MY QUESTION...BUT FRANKLY, I DON'T THINK I WOULD UNDERSTAND THE ANSWER.
ARE YOU DONE, HALFWOLF? WILL YOU KILL US, IF YOU COME NEAR?
FUCK YOU.
IT WAS MORNING BEFORE.
WHERE'S THE FUCKING SUN?
YOU'VE BEEN ASLEEP FOR MOST OF THE DAY, IN THAT NEST OF HALF-EATEN HUMAN BODIES.
WE COULDN'T WAKE YOU. SUCH A TERRIBLE SHAME.
THE BATTLE AT RAVENNA HAS BEGUN, HALFWOLF.
"AND FROM WHAT MY PEOPLE TELL ME, WE'VE ALREADY LOST."
TO BE CONTINUED...

MONSTRESS FAN ART

MONSTRESS TATTOO!

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